

## Duxbury's Double Daily Washup

### How Important Is Duxbury's Seacoast Location to Its Quality of Life?

By the REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

I snapped a picture out the plane window as we were flying by the snow-capped peaks of the Taishan Mountains in North West China. They were so beautiful against the blue sky background, but our guide squelched me quickly asking me not to take any more photos because they were forbidden for military security reasons. Looking down on the golden acres below of the parched Gobi Desert, I was struck to the horizon. One of these heading south I was told was the ancient silk route skirting the Indian Himalayas and crossing the Middle East as far as the Mediterranean Sea and even bringing back luscious grapes Harriet and I would enjoy later.

On landing and beginning our "Explorers' Tour" as this travel jaunt was called, we being the first white people ever seen by most of the natives, we discovered that these green "ribbons" were willow trees set in clumps of 4 since earlier attempts with single trees failed. These trees were irrigated by water brought down from the melting snows through tunnels so the hot desert sun would not evaporate it. These tunnels dug in some cases through solid rock were not only the means of nourishing these trees and thus reconquering the desert but they constituted the lifeline of our host city of Urumchi.

The history of man's search for water and his building settlements on the seashore or on riverbanks or the confluence of rivers is a familiar one.

In fact as most of us who live in Duxbury know, it was the presence of an abundant stream of water (now known as Town Brook) that led the Pilgrims to build their first permanent settlement in Plymouth. Also it was a fact that the erection of our earliest houses (at least up to 1750) was near springs and streams of water. Today over half of the population of the American nation live within a hundred miles of either ocean coast.

One of Duxbury's greatest charms is its proximity to the ocean. One day being intrigued by this I phoned several newcomers to Duxbury and asked why they had moved here and 8 out of the 10 I asked said it was the beach and the bay that brought them. It was my hope to make clear in this essay that there is much more to our location than mere geography and our proximity to the ocean is indeed a determining factor in our quality of life.

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violation that was promptly corrected with good grace. "Bob," he said, "the people of this town are proud of what they have and no one, but no one, would think of doing anything to damage its livability. You and the people of Duxbury should know this is the only clean body of water from the entrance of Cape Cod Canal to the New Hampshire border. We are a shining light in the field of clean harbors and the people of Duxbury intend to keep it that way." I reminded him of the morning news item that 15 Cape Cod towns have had their shores closed to shellfishing because of contamination. We then talked of Gerry Studds presenting a bill in the Congress that will focus federal attention on our coastal regions now daily turning up medical wastes and garbage on our beaches.

I raised the question of ocean contamination as illustrated by the death by poisoning of 7,000 seals in the North Sea off Norway and 50 whales that beached themselves at the entrance to the St. Lawrence River in Canada. "What are we going to do?" I asked, "if the oceans themselves become so polluted they can no longer provide us with the clean water for our periodic washups?" Man has exploited his environment, scarring the earth with his strip mining, remolding the landscape for highways and pumping toxic wastes into the air in the amount of 4 million tons a year. The oceans, those great balancing bodies that temper the sun's heat we always thought impregnable — a reproducing ability in themselves, but now we know better; we must care for them too. It was for this reason among others that the first item on the agenda of the recent meeting of the 7 Western powers in Paris was caring for the environment.

Rachel Carson wrote her first book, *The Sea Around Us*, calling attention to the fact that we had to care for it and then she wrote *Silent Spring* (occasioned, it is reported, by seeing a fallen robin on the Huckins lawn on a visit to Duxbury) that eliminated by act of Congress most injurious pesticides. A friend gave me another book she wrote entitled *The Edge of the Sea* about the precious creatures that live just below high water mark and would perish were it not for the periodic refreshment the tides bring them. I read in the Aug. 7 issue of *US News and World Report* in a paragraph entitled, "As trees fall in the tropics, song birds fall silent" that there has been an overall decline of song birds of about 307 on average over the past 9 years. I spoke to Les Smith a neighbor of mine and consultant in environmental management. He spoke of the changing habits of migratory birds, many of whom have been deprived of winter roosting shelters through the deforestation of the tropics. This together with hydrocarbon emissions from automobiles and the storm-runoffs into the marshes and the bay constitute a real threat to the quality of water and of life in Duxbury. The time is long gone when people used to secure a parcel of waterfront, fill it up with soil and gravel and build a

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8 am and noon that fateful day?

Looking back at our past mutual self destruction we are appalled at man's "inhumanity to man" over the centuries. Today the rescue of our planet and its return to a place that can foster and nurture human life is a top priority. As I complete this series of essays of Duxbury and its environment, I hope those who read these lines will constitute themselves agents to promote life on this planet, and not the death past practices have achieved. The fish are giving us the message, and so are the birds of the air. They are telling us that if they cannot live on this planet, and so many have disappeared already, neither can we. In caring for and protecting them we are caring for and protecting ourselves and future generations.

In one essay I reminded our readers of the old practice of caging white mice deep in the mines where men worked who would be greatly agitated if the quality of the air fell below a certain level. Many animals, fish and birds are telling us now that we are endangering our very life by our present lifestyle on the planet and hopefully change is taking place. We in Duxbury have a previous heritage to maintain.

### SURPRISE

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said. "However, the most sensible approach to the town manager's suggestion would be to conduct a study over the next 2 to 3 months with the results being implemented in the FY91 budget and in place by July 1, 1990."

The committee voted unanimously to endorse Jane Aswell's resolution noting the committee's deep concern for the present status of the schools.

"Duxbury is unique in its school funding dilemma," Kennedy said. "We combine an unusually high ratio of residential property with an unusually high ratio of school-age children (example: 24% of Duxbury's population were in the public schools in 1985, compared with 11.1% in Wellesley, 13.1% in Needham, 15% in Winchester or 16.1% in Hingham.)

"There is no question that school services already have been reduced, reduced to a degree that is as yet not generally known among parents and students," Kennedy said.

(Resolution drafted by School Committee member Jane Aswell. Voted unanimously. Read at town meeting.)

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ed several newcomers to Duxbury and asked why they had moved here and 8 out of the 10 I asked said it was the beach and the bay that brought them. It was my hope to make clear in this essay that there is much more to our location than mere geography and our proximity to the ocean is indeed a determining factor in our quality of life.

I have titled this article "Duxbury's Double Daily Washup" to show the vast share of this quality of life our incoming and outgoing tides bring us. The exchange of tidal water amounts to 2/3 of the total. Every 12 hours an enormous influx of fresh (salt) water from Cape Cod Bay comes into this triple bay area and returns to that body of water. There are 35,000,000,000 gallons in these bays at mean high water and a third of this at low water. At low water 7 creeks and rivers pour fresh water sequestered by our woodlands into the bays and thus add to the variety of life that shares these marshes and shores and waters. What all this interchange does to our climate and our share of air makes an interesting study especially when placed alongside our normal wind currents.

My second son Michael, a meteorologist, has taught me much about the relationship of tides and oceans and winds aloft and close to the earth. He began a job with Bechtel Engineering in San Francisco who early on offered him a promotion if he would move to St. Louis. Despite the increase in salary he turned it down. Thinking this over I acknowledged to him my disappointment and asked, "Was all that clean air travelling thousands of miles over the Pacific a factor in your decision?" He admitted it was. Earlier one day as we were sailing on Duxbury under a thunder-clouded sky, he told us where to head to avoid the storm. He told us electric storms generally avoid sizable bodies of water.

I spent an hour with our diligent and devoted harbor master asking questions about the effect on Duxbury's life of the tidal influx of ocean water twice a day. He waxed eloquent about this, saying that this is a lucky town to have this bay and beach as a front yard. As shellfish officer, Don has oversight over any and all effluents into the bay, and with a crew of men keeps an aggressive watch over possible pollution that might render our shellfish inedible and swimming impossible. Two years ago a thorough survey was made of the entire shoreline and nothing adverse was turned up. Don spoke of the tremendous civic pride of Duxbury people in their town and the conscientious way they are going about expanding septic systems, for example a great expense to make doubly sure no contamination gets into the tributaries and hence into the bay. I know in fact of one household not far from the water that took out a second mortgage to expand their septic system. But Don still worries about catastrophic downpours that could flood all the storm sewers and wreak havoc with the water in the bay. I asked Don about long-standing drains into the bay and I used to know them on the Maine coast and if there were any attempts to bypass normal channels of disposal. He replied that in all his 13 years as harbor master there may have been one

ment. He spoke of the changing habits of migratory birds, many of whom have been deprived of winter roosting shelters through the deforestation of the tropics. This together with hydrocarbon emissions from automobiles and the storm-runoffs into the marshes and the bay constitute a real threat to the quality of water and of life in Duxbury. The time is long gone when people used to secure a parcel of waterfront, fill it up with soil and gravel and build a house on it. This was the Wright goal when John Wright bought Duxbury Beach in the mid 1880's and drew plans for 263 house lots, with a new wooden bridge he would help build to service the area. Two successive blizzards in 1888 and 1889 that lopped several feet off the beach dunes turned him away from the project, but he did build the bridge paying 1/3 of its cost of \$30,000. The Beach Reservation that now owns and operates the beach together with the town officials represents a great deal of imaginative work. Al Krahmer leads a valiant band of "beach-savers" to plant grass on it every year and seek its future preservation.

I spoke with Bob Millar, chairman of the Beach Reservation,—about the status of effluents from the Plymouth sewage treatment plant. I knew Bob had been in on all the studies that have been done in this area and he was glad to report good news. Duxbury, Plymouth and Kingston bays are what is known in the Commonwealth parlance as "ocean sanctuaries," and they come under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth. A deciding factor in this jurisdiction is what is called "embayment," that is a delineation of the bay area. Much discussion has taken place about this line and for years it was from Gurnet to Manomet, but with a bill before the state legislature probably coming up in September it will be from Gurnet to Rocky Point, allowing Plymouth to dispose of its treated sewage outside the triple bay area and no longer intruding into Duxbury and Kingston bays and Plymouth harbor. I am especially pleased about this outlook because Howland's Landing where Harriet and I swim is directly connected by channel to Plymouth harbor. It was this channel and the prevailing southwest winds that I believe led the Plymouth leaders Standish, Brewster and Eaton to settle on the Nook (now Standish Shore) and enabled the entire bay community to locate here and near the present Burial Ground.

We are living in what are called changing times, but I don't think that expression does justice to the situation people on this planet find themselves in. So many problems or opportunities as I choose to call them face us today like no other generation has ever faced. Our relations with other nation states, the existence of the nation state itself are all under question today. We are still manufacturing nuclear weapons in 51 spots across the country. The threat of nuclear annihilation is so powerful that we have had 40 years of peace; old enmities between nations have disappeared. Do you suppose that the human race is going to tolerate again the deaths of 60,000 British soldiers on only one side of the battle of the Meuse River on Sept. 27, 1916 all of whom died between the hours of

have been reduced, reduced to a degree that is as yet not generally known among parents and students," Kennedy said.

*(Resolution drafted by School Committee member Jane Aswell. Voted unanimously. Read at town meeting.)*

The Duxbury School Committee is submitting proposed cuts in the current school budget in the amount of \$328,000 to special town meeting on this Sept. 11, 1989. The School Committee is doing this because of its responsibility in maintaining a school program even in the face of serious financial conditions such as these. We would like you to know, however, that we have made these cuts with deep concern for the present status of our schools as well as their future.

In short, this committee believes that the resulting school program falls far short of what we consider to be adequate in terms of the educational resources being made available to the children of Duxbury.

We recognize that Town Meeting has every right to explore any sound means of eliminating these cuts from the school or any town department. But knowing that all departments are suffering, we are also aware that there are few, if any, viable alternatives to cutting the full \$328,000.

If Town Meeting does decide to accept these cuts, then it should do so with the deepest regrets and concern, and with the knowledge that the school program being offered in Duxbury this year will not be of the quality that we feel obligated to provide.

We recommend that if at any point during the year the state restores any or all of the local aid that is now being withheld, that this town meeting vote to designate that those monies be restored to the schools in the same proportion that they were originally cut.

### First Day of School



Lauren Arkeno and Krista Allaire arrive at school.

Photo by Deni Johnson